

"IL TROVATORE'S" WRITER.

INFANCY AND EARLY LIFE OF THE GREAT LYRIC DRAMATIST.

PEL TO WHICH, WHEN A LITTLE BABE, THE FUTURE MUSICAL GENIE WAS EXPOSED—HUMBLE CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS CHILDHOOD—HIS EARLY CHARACTERISTICS—EVENTS OF HIS YOUNG MANHOOD.

At the time of the Russo-Austrian invasion of Italy, in 1859, the little village of Roncole, of some 200 inhabitants, situated in a remote corner of the Parmesan Duchy, fell in the path of the invaders. The people, in their alarm for their safety, betook themselves, as a place of refuge, of their church, which was on a road some distance from the village, and might be overlooked; or, if discovered, in some degree respected by the bear-drinking barbarians; and so, to the low-roofed, square-towered little chapel, standing now very much as it did then, they hurried for protection. Among the rest of those who thus sought safety was a strong-limbed, fair-faced young woman. She bore in her arms a child which had not yet reached its first birthday. She was a common woman of the people, with but scant education, used to hard work, and without any thought, hope, or aspiration above her station. But she loved her boy, loved him with all the fervor and intensity of her warm Southern nature. In that moment of excitement and wild alarm she thought only of his safety. She heeded not the cries of "I soldati, i Russi e gli Austriaci," which were echoed all about her. She heard nothing, said nothing; she knew only that her child was in danger. She looked neither to the right nor to the left. She saw only the tower of the church, the place of refuge in which she trusted. To that she hurried, pale and panting, yet firm of foot, and holding the boy with an embrace which could not easily be broken. At last she reached the church, only to find it filled by scores of other unfortunate who had arrived before her. For a moment she looked wildly about; then, darting through a doorway, ran down a dark passage, with which she was evidently familiar. At its end a small panel opened upon a whitewashed staircase. This she ascended, and in a few moments was in the tower. From it she saw the soldiers pass through Roncole, plundering and destroying as they went. But at last they were gone, and she, with her child, was safe.

She little knew, that good Parmesan mother, that the boy whom she had thus shielded from harm would live to gain the admiration and applause of the civilized world. Yet such was the case. The child was Giuseppe Verdi, now recognized as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, of living composers. At "San' Agata," his favorite home, just off of Busseto, and within sight of the church tower of Roncole, the kindly master—kindly and modest, despite his boundless distinction and fame—gave me material for the following sketch of his eventful life, as far as I can learn, by the way, which is, up to the present, the only one in the English language.

Verdi first saw the light in a low, one-storyed house, almost a hut, in the wayside village of Roncole, some miles from Busseto. The house, used as a wine shop, is still standing, shaded by overhanging trees, and on one side supported by, rather than supporting, maws of creeping vines, which grow in rank profusion. Carlo and Luigia Verdi, the father and mother of the child born in this modest dwelling, were as unpretending as were their surroundings. Ostensibly, they were inn-keepers and their principal support was derived from the sale of the light new wines of the country. This trade, however, was supplemented by retailing to the peasants in the neighborhood small quantities of tea, sugar, coffee, and tobacco. As may well be imagined the people who could live such a life quietly, even contentedly, and without any hope or aspiration for the future were not exactly calculated to recognize or develop the genius which was in their son. And yet many evidences of such genius might readily have been discovered in the little Giuseppe. From the first he was a most remarkable, almost a phenomenal child. He seldom spoke, liked best to be by himself, and as he grew found no pleasure in the noisy games which delighted the other children of the village. Yet he was ever cheerful, amiable and intelligent, and worked industriously at whatever light occupation his father or mother found for him. Indeed, he seldom slept recreation of any kind, and from his birth seemed to find in music his only real and great pleasure. This fact may be mentioned as all the more wonderful when it is stated that neither his father nor mother, nor any of their ancestors as far as they knew, ever displayed any particular talent or liking for music. Nor was the taste for it cultivated by any of the people of Roncole. They were too much occupied in getting a scant living to think of developing such talents, even if they had it. So it happened that from the time he could walk Giuseppe Verdi, of all the two hundred and odd inhabitants of his native village, was the greatest admirer, if not the best patron, of the stray harp-organ men who might chance to pass by. He was frequently known to follow one of them not only from house to house, but from village to village, miles over the country, constantly listening to and apparently gaining constant renewed pleasure from the old and hackneyed melodies played by them.

The boy grew older, he continued to manifest the signs of his musical genius and these were recognized and appreciated by his father, who gave him as much encouragement as was possible. When seven years old he was sent to the local organist for instruction, and, at the age of seventeen, the authorities of Busseto, in accordance with a time-honored custom of aiding poor young men who displayed any remarkable ability for the arts, decided to send him to Milan to complete his musical education. Here he improved rapidly and soon gained for himself a widespread reputation in musical circles. His compositions, which appeared rapidly at this time, were greatly admired by those who heard them, but they were not published. Indeed, it is a fact worthy of some attention that many of them lying on

his hands were subsequently embodied in and applauded as being among the genus in his most popular operas.

It was in 1835, while he was still engaged in this financially unproductive work, that his old teacher died at Busseto. Arriving there to attend the funeral, he was offered the vacant place of organist and leader in the village church. This, after some hesitation, he accepted, his decision being greatly influenced by the bright eyes of Margherita Barzini, his old playfellow, whom he soon afterward married. From her father he received, as a wedding present, the piano upon which subsequently he composed most of his operas, and which, with the queer little spine given him by his father, are now among the treasures of the Verdi Villa Sant' Agata. The life which he now led at Busseto was in every way free from care, yet it was not one to satisfy a man of his ambition, a man who felt that he had a work to do. For three years he tried hard to be contented, but at the end of this time he was again in Milan without money or influence, ready to commence anew. Here, after a few weeks of aimless drifting, he met a young man named Solera, a poet, and, like himself, a needy and unaided aspirant for fame and fortune. They put their heads together, Solera, like all poets, was sure that he could write greater drama than any which had ever been produced, and Verdi, not nearly so confident, but still determined, thought he could set such a drama to music. The result, after a year's work, was the acceptance and production at La Scala of Verdi's first opera, "Oberto Conte di S. Bonifacio." It was produced on the 17th of November, 1839, the leading roles in it being assumed by Salvini, the tenor, the basso, afterward known in America, and Mme. Rainierini-Marin. The opera was well represented and was a success. So great a success, indeed, that the Directors of La Scala gave Verdi a commission to write three new operas for them. The libretto of the first of these, which was to be a comic work, "Un Giorno di Regno," was handed to him at once, and full of high hope he began the task. Hardly had he undertaken it, however, when he discovered that he was not fitted to write comic music. His whole nature revolted against the work. Still he went on with it, and might have met with some degree of success. But even as he commenced to see his way clear to a creditable performance there came to him the first great sorrow of his life. His fondly loved wife was taken with a violent Southern fever, and died in a few days. His infant child quickly followed her to the grave, and was left a one-left alone to weep at their tomb; and write for the theatre, he left Milan, and once more returned to quiet Busseto. Here he remained for some months, at the end of which, finding that there was no employment for him, he went once more to Milan with the intention of giving lessons in music. For a time he continued to thus occupy himself, and he fondly hoped that he might be left quiet to earn a frugal living and pass his days in the studies which also at this time gave him pleasure. Even while he was contemplating this existence, however, his admirers, if not his friends, were making other plans for him. Signor Merelli, the Director of La Scala, had never lost faith in him, and knew that if he could be roused from the fit of despondency and melancholy into which he had fallen he might be expected to do great work. And the task of so ardent a man as Merelli devoted himself. —*H. C.*, in the *New York Times*.

(To be continued.)

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(To be continued.)

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